

Christ the Messiah-God
Antler, Aug. 8, 1937

My Junior year at College I heard a philosophy professor tell of an experience at a Pennsylvania University. In one of his classes a great scholar was asked the difference between Christ and Socrates. The Professor replied slowly--both were great teachers, both taught by word of mouth and left to their disciples the writing down of their teachings, both hit hard at the so-called religious leaders and thinkers of their day, both were misunderstood by their contemporaries, both were condemned to death, and both were innocent of the charges that were brought against them. "But the great difference is this," he concluded, "Socrates died an old man. He had finished his work. But Jesus Christ died in his youth. His greatest work may have been before him." There he stopped. Not a word about Christ's great mission of redemption on earth, not a word about the Son of God who became Man, nor about his glorious resurrection, ~~from the dead~~. To that distinguished scholar, Jesus was just another great intellect tragically martyred at 33.

What that man thought about Christ matters little. What you think of him matters a great deal. Today you, as Christians are called upon to answer the most important question ever asked. How you answer it affects the whole course of your life. It is the question asked by Jesus 2000 years ago, "What think ye of Christ. Whose Son is he?" You can make but two answers. He is the son of Joseph, or the Son of God. Every man faces this decision at some time in his life--was Christ man, was he on a par with Socrates, Buddha, Muhammed; or is he vastly more than man, the very Son of the Living God.

At the Lake Metigoshe Young People's Conference this

summer, a speaker asked a question startling in its implications. This is what she asked. "If Christ is not the Son of God, was he a good man?" The first impulse is to say "Yes, of course, he was good. He healed the sick, taught the gospel of love, went about doing good." But think it over a while. We shall see, shortly, that if Jesus were not God he was not only not good, but was the greatest charlatan and cheat, the most deplorable liar and blasphemer that ever lived.

But let's go back for a moment and examine a technical theological difficulty to calling Jesus the son of Joseph. If Jesus were the son of the carpenter he would be cut off from all right to the throne of David, and thus could not claim to be the Messiah, the promised Redeemer. For Joseph was of the seed of Coniah, tracing his descent back to David through Solomon, as we see in Matthew's genealogical table of Jesus. And God had declared through Jeremiah the Prophet, the 22nd chapter of his book, that no descendant of Coniah, also called Jeckoniah, could ever sit upon the throne of David. Therefore Jesus the son of Joseph could not have claimed the throne which Jesus the son of Mary claimed. For Mary was descended from David, not through Coniah and Solomon, but through another son of David, Nathan. This then is Jesus' title to the throne of David clear.

If I were speaking as a lawyer trying to prove before you as a jury the Deity of Christ, I would probably base my whole argument on the fact of Christ's resurrection from the dead. Such proof is unassailable. Paul's quick mind saw this at once, and the resurrection lies at the heart and center of his gospel. But I'm not arguing this morning. We are called of Christ, not so much to defend the gospel, as to proclaim

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it. And I'm just going to present to you the testimony of three or four witnesses. Observe how they answered the question, "What think ye of Christ, whose son is he?"

First, who did the disciples say Jesus was? If anybody knew him they did. For three long years they followed him from city to city. When he had no place to lay his head they slept in the fields with him. For him they had given up their businesses, their families--all they the world holds dear. Surely they who were closer than his own brothers would know whose Son he was. What does Matthew say? Matthew, the reformed miser and tax-gatherer. He hesitates not at all, "Jesus is the son of God." In the account he gives of Jesus' baptism he writes, "And lo a voice out of the heavens saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

But perhaps you are more interested in the statement of Judas Iscariot. ^{Be- lie- ver- in- Je- su- s} Surely the traitor did not believe in Christ. Let me read a few verses from the 27th chapter of Matthew, 3 and 5. Notice he said, "I have betrayed innocent blood!" Now Jesus was charged with blasphemy--with calling himself the Son of God, thereby saying he was equal with God. Of this he was found guilty, yet Judas, the betrayer, declares him innocent. In effect then, Judas here vouches for the Deity of Christ, for if Jesus did not blaspheme he was the Son of God. That is the testimony of Judas.

We must turn to Peter however, for the clearest witness on this point--in the 16th chapter of Matthew. Peter had ~~the~~ a peculiar ability to climb to spiritual heights, then fall and hit the depths. Here near Caesarea Philippi he hit both the heights and depths. On the same day that Jesus said to him, "Blessed art thou Simon Barjonas, thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church," he also said to him, "Get thee behind me Satan." This is how he received Christ's bless-

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ing. Christ had asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" And they had told him ~~the men~~^{Sons} were calling him John the Baptist returned to earth, ^{others} or Elisha or Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Then he turned squarely to them with the question, "But whom say ye that I am?" And Peter^{and the rest} had enthusiastically broken out with, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." For that Jesus called him blessed. Note well, that his disciples, the ones who knew him best declared with one voice, "Thou art the Son of God."

But disregard if you wish the testimony of the disciples. Go still deeper into the question, and ask Jesus himself. in his own words, "What say ye of Christ, whose son is he?" Read for yourself his unequivocal answer. It's right in our text for the morning--the sixth miracle performed by Christ as recorded for us in John, the healing of the man born blind. It is interesting to note the stages of the man's belief. Jesus gave him sight--for the first time in his life he saw. And when the Pharisees tried to tell him that his healer had sinned in working the miracle on the Sabbath, the man just laughed, nothing could shake his belief in the goodness and mercy of Jesus. Jesus a good man--that's as far as the man's belief went--a good worker of wonders. That conviction was firm, however, not even excommunication from the synagogue could shake it, and that meant political and social ostracization, ^{as well as} and spiritual condemnation. It made him an outcast from his people, it was a living death. While he was blind he had needed a healer, but now that he saw, he needed more than a healer. He needed a Saviour.

How the Saviour came to him is told in the text, which also shows us Jesus answer to the Question, "What think ye of Christ?" Read John 9:35-37. Illustration of Passport.

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But Jesus needed no passport. His simple word was sufficient--his works were better than any passport. The man believed and worshipped him. And he went his way rejoicing. Now the condemnation of the Pharisees meant nothing to him, for had not the Son of God healed him, proclaimed himself to him, and said, 'I do not condemn thee.'

It is by this very passage that those who deny the Deity of Christ must brand him as a shameless impostor. Here he puts forth his clear claim to be the Son of the heavenly Father. Every man must be prepared to accept him at his word, or declare him a liar.

But do not stop with the testimony of the disciples, nor even with that of Jesus. Look beyond the gospels to the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles. More striking[^] even than his words, the life of Paul answers the question, "Whose son is the Christ?" His life may be divided sharply into two divisions--before and after Damascus. Before Damascus he would have said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the heretic, is the son of Joseph." Because eight years of theological training at the feet of Gamaliel, foremost master of his age, had made of Paul a keen logician, sound thinker, and rigid religious scholar. He called himself a Pharisee of the Pharisees, and as such displayed commendable zeal in persecuting a group of strangely obstinate followers of an obscure religious pretender and fanatic named Jesus of Nazareth. He went among them "breathing fire and slaughter."

And then suddenly at Damascus Saul of Tarsus became Paul the Apostle. Saul the persecuter became Paul the persecuted. Not only did he renounce his future as leader of the Pharisees, but he even threw himself into the arms of the very sect he had been stamping out, and went on long journeys preaching the new religion. Small things are often behind great changes. It was just a small, but vital, ^{shift} change in his

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thinking that changed Paul--a ^{shift} change from believing Jesus the son of Joseph to belief in Jesus the Son of God. A small change perhaps, but do you realize how long a period elapsed between his conversion and his active ministry--10 years. 10 years to adjust his thinking and his life to this new truth concerning the person of Jesus. Ten years of intense study and application, but it has given us some of the greatest truths ever written. For now he writes of Jesus, Col. 2:9--"In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Peter says, "Thou art the Christ the Son of the Living God." Paul writes "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." And Jesus himself says, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Thou hast both seen him and it is he that talketh with thee." What are you saying of Jesus?

Believe me it makes a vital difference what you do believe on this point. Ill. Definition of religion and theology: Religion-the life of God in the sould of man; theology-what man thinks about God.
"As a man thinketh in his heart so is he." *(C. H. Morgan)*

The scriptures teach emphatically that Christ is the Son of God. The clearest presentation of the impact that this truth has on our lives, I think, is found in G. Campbell Morgan's, "Categorical Imperatives of the Christian Faith" a quotation of which I will read in closing, "What is the effect of this truth on personal experience. It is the truth that gives my soul rest when I read it in connection with another;-"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." If He is only Jesus, a Man and nothing more, high, noble, beautiful, I cannot trust Him with my soul. If He be God I can.

"The effect his has upon service is that of the consciousness of the deepest relationship of the soul to God in Him, and that as

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the basis of our work for him. The cosmic passion becomes the inspiration of work. And because ~~I~~ in Him I saw God bow, and bend, and stoop to Golgotha to ransom men, sacrifice becomes the principle of service.

"If He is only Man then I am an idolator. If He is very God, then the man who denies it is a blasphemer. There can be no union between those who hold His Deity and those who deny it."